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Tobacco-Free Lee Coalition Recognizes Lee County Electric Cooperative Tobacco Free Worksite Policy

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Fort Myers, Fla. – The Tobacco-Free Lee Coalition is recognizing Lee County Electric Cooperative in Fort Myers for their worksite tobacco-free policy. Lee County Electric Cooperative (LCEC) has worked with the Tobacco-Free Lee Coalition and its partners to become a tobacco free worksite and offer tobacco cessation services to its employees.

LCEC enacted a tobacco-free workplace policy which has greatly reduced the number of employees using tobacco. LCEC's policy covers all types of tobacco products, including but not limited to cigarettes, cigars, pipes, smokeless tobacco (chewing tobacco, snuff, dip, or any other product that contains tobacco), clove cigarettes and any other smoking devices such as hookahs and e-cigarettes.

"We offer free smoking and tobacco cessation support, counseling and products through our onsite Wellness Center," said Laura Puerto, LCEC Senior Public Relations Specialist. "Those employees who wish to continue using tobacco pay a higher premium for health care and are not permitted to use tobacco on the LCEC campus or any LCEC properties including vehicles. A tobacco free work environment is not easy for those who use but they have done a great job adapting and no doubt their use has been reduced tremendously which has evident benefits. The benefit of reducing secondhand smoke is also quite notable because our policy has raised awareness on the dangers."

Cigarette smoking remains the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the United States, accounting for more than 480,000 deaths per year.¹ Smoking also impacts almost every system in the body, causing lung cancer, heart disease, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and even sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Secondhand smoke exposure contributes to approximately 41,000 deaths among nonsmoking adults and 400 deaths in infants each year.¹

"If you encourage and support your employees to live a healthy lifestyle, they will likely make it priority in their lives," Puerto said. "Companies that want to have a healthier work force must lead by example and commit fully to health-related initiatives. It isn't always the most popular stance, but the rewards can be measured in reduced health-care costs related to cancer, heart disease and stroke. Providing information and education about the dangers of tobacco use is the first, easiest, and most critical step toward a wellness initiative of this type. Utilizing the facts, real life stories, and highlighting the benefits goes a long way toward garnering buy-in."

LCEC has received several awards in employee wellness such as the Fit Friendly Award from the American Heart Association and public recognition for its participation in the Million Mile Movement and various awareness walks, as well as mentions in the Healthy Lee initiative.

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1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. [The Health Consequences of Smoking—50 Years of Progress: A Report of the Surgeon General](#). Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2014 [accessed 2019 Jan 30].